

SUMMER FOOD HANDLING TIPS

Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day picnics, graduation parties, and family cookouts; summer is around the corner and so is picnic and barbeque season. Cookouts can be fun but feeding a large group away from our homes can make food safety especially challenging.

Unwashed hands, undercooked meats, cross-contamination from raw meats to other foods and eating unwashed fruits and vegetables can result in a host of food-borne diseases. Food borne diseases are more common than what many of us would think. For example, what many people call 'stomach flu' or 'intestinal virus' is very often food poisoning, resulting in symptoms from mild nausea to a serious condition requiring medical treatment and hospitalization. Especially at risk are young children, the elderly and people with diseases that involve the immune system, such as asthma, arthritis, cancer HIV, diabetes, liver and kidney diseases. In the United States, around 76 million cases of food-borne illness, resulting in 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths, are estimated to occur each year.

The Department of Health and Senior Services has some simple food safety tips for you.

First, remember the basics. Wash hands well and often with soap and water, especially after using the bathroom and before food preparation or eating. Make hand washing convenient by bringing water jug, some soap and paper towels. Another option is to consider using moist disposable towelettes for hand cleaning along with an alcohol based hand sanitizing solution.

Food Safety Transporting Tips:

- Keep your cold food cold. Place cold food in a cooler with ice or frozen gel packs. Cold food should be held at or below 41 degrees F.
- Meat, poultry, and seafood can be packed while it is frozen so that it stays colder longer.
- Always keep raw meat, poultry, and seafood securely wrapped by using separate containers or heavy duty zip lock bags so that their juices do not contaminate cooked foods or foods eaten raw, such as fruits and vegetables.
- Remember to rinse raw fruits and vegetables in water before packing them. (Packaged fruits and vegetables labeled ready-to-eat washed, or

triple washed need not be washed.) Dry fruits and vegetables with a clean cloth towel or paper towel.

- Keep the cooler in the air-conditioned passenger compartment of your car, rather than in a hot trunk. Limit the times the cooler is opened. Keep the cooler in a shaded location. Putting a towel over the cooler also helps to keep the cooler contents chilled.

Food Safety Grilling Tips:

- Marinate foods in your refrigerator, not on the counter or outdoors. If some of the marinade is to be used as a sauce on the cooked food, reserve a portion separately before adding the raw meat, poultry, or seafood. Do not reuse marinade.
- Do not use the same platter and utensils that previously held raw meat or seafood to serve cooked meats and seafood.
- If you partially cook food in the microwave, oven, or stove to reduce grilling time, do so immediately before the food goes on the hot grill.
- When it is time to cook the food, cook it thoroughly. Use a food thermometer to be sure.
 - Beef, veal, and lamb steaks and roasts – 145 degrees F for medium rare, 160 degrees F for medium, and 170 degrees F for well done.
 - Ground pork and ground beef – 155 degrees F. Undercooked hamburgers can be especially hazardous to your children, the elderly and those immunosuppressed .
 - Ground poultry – 165 degrees F,
 - Whole poultry (take measurement in the thigh) – 180 degrees F.
 - Fin fish – 145 degrees F. or until the flesh is opaque and separates easily with a fork.
 - Shrimp, lobster, and crabs – the meat should be pearly and opaque.
 - Clams, oysters, and mussels – until the shells are open.

- Grilled food can be kept hot until served by moving it to the side of the grill rack, just away from the coals where it can overcook.

Time to Eat – Food Safety Tips When You Serve Food:

- Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot.
- Do not use a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry, or seafood for anything else unless the plate has first been washed in hot, soapy water.
- Hot food should be kept hot, at or above 135 degrees F. Wrap well and place in an insulated container.
- Foods like chicken salad and desserts in individual serving dishes can also be placed directly on ice, or in a shallow container set in a deep pan filled with ice. Drain off water as ice melts and replace ice frequently.
- Do not let perishable food sit out longer than two hours.
- Food should not sit out for more than one hour in temperatures above 90 degrees F. The hotter the day, the quicker food can become hazardous. So start chilling the left overs or store hot food over 135 F by the use of a sternos or moving it to the side of the grill rack. The grill must remain on at low temperature.

One tip is worth repeating. Many of us just worry about the potato, macaroni or egg salad and tend to overlook our fresh fruit and vegetables. Food borne disease outbreaks from fresh vegetables consumed raw are becoming an increasing concern to health officials. So remember to wash your fresh veggies and fruit thoroughly.